

July 26 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1996

solve that I couldn't. [Laughter] So it's been another exercise in Presidential humility from you, sir. Thank you very much.

It's been a wonderful afternoon. Thank you. God bless you all, and good day. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:50 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to U.S. Representative Benjamin A. Gilman and economist Paul A. Samuelson, National Medal of Science recipient.

Statement on the Death of Hector Garcia

July 26, 1996

Hillary and I are deeply saddened to learn of the death of Dr. Hector P. Garcia. The founder of the American GI Forum, Dr. Garcia fought for half a century for the civil and educational rights of Mexican-Americans. A national hero and decorated Army veteran, Dr. Garcia became the first Hispanic-American to be awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Nation's highest civilian honor.

Recently, Texas A&M University in Corpus Christi, his hometown, dedicated the Hector P. Garcia Plaza and established the Hector P. Garcia Scholarship Endowment. It is a fitting tribute to a man who fought for the rights of Hispanic-Americans, veterans, and all Americans throughout his life. Hillary and I extend our deepest condolences to his family and to all the Latino community.

The President's Radio Address and an Exchange With Reporters

July 27, 1996

Centennial Olympic Park Bombing

The President. Good morning. The bombing at Centennial Olympic Park this morning was an evil act of terror. It was aimed at the innocent people who were participating in the Olympic games and in the spirit of the Olympics, an act of cowardice that stands in sharp contrast to the courage of the Olympic athletes.

On behalf of all Americans, let me extend my condolences to the families of those who lost their lives and our prayers to those who were injured. I want to thank the brave security personnel who were on the scene. They saw the package; they alerted the bomb squad; they cleared the crowd. They prevented a much greater loss of life.

I also want to compliment the medical personnel of all the hospitals, those who were operating the ambulances, they and the volunteers who were helping people who were down at the scene. Those of us who watched it throughout the night last night could not have been failed to be impressed by their courage, their competence, their real heroism under pressure.

Last night I was awakened by Mr. Panetta shortly after the explosion, and I continued to receive reports and follow events until the press conference early this morning. Then this morning the Vice President and I spoke to the president of the International Olympic Committee, the president of the Atlanta committee for the games, the Governor of Georgia, the mayor of Atlanta, the Attorney General, and the Director of the FBI.

I want to make clear our common determination. We will spare no effort to find out who was responsible for this murderous act. We will track them down. We will bring them to justice. We will see that they are punished. In the meanwhile, we are all agreed the games will go on. We will take every necessary step to protect the athletes and those who are attending the games.

I know that the people who've worked so hard to put on these Olympics, the people of Atlanta, the thousands and thousands of volunteers, are more determined than ever to see them to a successful conclusion. Already we see the spirit at work this morning. The mayor

spoke about the significant numbers of people in the streets in Atlanta. President Samaranich reported to me on the events that are already taking place and said there were large crowds of spectators at them and that the people were clearly determined to go forward and attend the games and follow them.

Let me say finally that an act of vicious terror like this is clearly directed at the spirit of our own democracy. It seeks to rip also at the spirit of the Olympics. We are doing everything in our power to prevent these attacks. There's been an enormous effort made to establish security at the sites of all the events. At the park itself, the investigation will continue today and then there will be additional security measures taken there.

But we must not let these attacks stop us from going forward. We cannot let terror win; that is not the American way. The Olympics will continue. The games will go on. The Olympic spirit will prevail. We must be firm in this; we cannot be intimidated by acts of terror.

Thank you very much.

Q. Mr. President, do you think this reflects on the United States in terms of its ability to protect the people?

The President. Well, actually, I believe, first of all, that there's—everyone says, including all the people who have participated in Olympics for decades, that this is the best and most extensive security effort ever undertaken at all the events. I think they would all say that there was more concern about the Olympic park than any other place because it was thought that there had to be some place where the general public could congregate, people who did not have tickets to the games but were there in town, wanted to participate, wanted a place where they could go and swap the pins and do all the things that they can do. And they wanted to make some entertainment available to the public for free.

Now, I would point out that even there, a place that was more open, someone spotted that suspicious package last night and alerted the bomb squad and helped to clear the area and dramatically minimized the loss that would otherwise have occurred. So they are looking now at what else can be done to secure that particular area when it can be reopened after the investigation has been completed.

Q. Would you support the death penalty for whoever is found to have done this?

The President. Well, I support the death penalty for terrorism that leads to murder; I always have. And we—if you look at what we did in the crime bill, you know that. I believe that people who deliberately kill each other—kill other people, excuse me—particularly under circumstances demonstrating this kind of cowardice and designed to intimidate and cover large numbers of others, deserve capital punishment. I certainly do.

Q. Mr. President, can you definitively eliminate the possibility of any type of attack at the Olympic games?

The President. I don't think anyone has ever been in a position to definitively eliminate an attack anywhere in America, you know, or anyplace in the world. But I can say this—I will say what I have said before: If you talk to anybody associated with these Olympics, they will tell you that the security effort is the most extensive ever made. And if you talk to anyone involved in American law enforcement where there are many different agencies at different levels of government, I think they will tell you this is by far the best coordinated effort that has ever been made.

And let me say again, as much as I grieve that this incident occurred at all, I want to reiterate the fact that people on the spot there were alert enough to see this package, to call the bomb squad, to clear people out, and to save a lot of lives. As much as we grieve for the injuries that were there, I think that is important.

So I would say that they have done as good a job as could be done, particularly at the events. They were always concerned about any open area, where you have so many people operating in an open area. And they are examining what can be done, what should be done there during this period when the criminal investigation is going on.

Q. Mr. President, Chelsea has been at the Olympics all this past week. Speaking as a father, what is your own personal reaction to this? Would you not feel some sense of anger that more might have been done to prevent this tragedy, but what is your first personal reaction to this?

The President. Well, my first personal reaction was—I thought about it last night, of course, because she was in the park quite often and visited the pin exchange place there. And I

was—my first personal reaction was that I hope nobody else's children get hurt down there.

But I would say to you that these people have done a very good job planning and bringing off this Olympics. And I don't think anyone believes that we live in a risk-free world. And I think it's important not to jump to any conclusions about who did or didn't do what here. We'll look into this, and we will find who's responsible.

But on balance, I still would say to you I feel good about the efforts they have made there. They've worked very, very hard. And we just have to keep working. And they are examining, even as we speak—you know, the Vice President's been heavily involved in this. And we talked about it last night when he and I both were awakened, and then we had a visit and talked about it again this morning. They're

examining even as we speak whether there is some way to increase the security at the centennial park and still make it a place where a larger number of people who cannot either obtain or could not afford tickets to the events themselves can come and go. Everyone always knew that was the most open and most vulnerable place.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Briefing Room at the White House, and the address was broadcast live on radio and television. In his remarks, he referred to Juan Antonio Samaranch, president, International Olympic Committee; William P. Payne, president, Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games; Gov. Zell Miller of Georgia; and Mayor Bill Campbell of Atlanta, GA.

Teleconference Remarks to “Adelante Con Clinton” Participants

July 27, 1996

The President. Hello.

Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Henry Cisneros. Mr. President, this is Henry, and Federico's on the line as well, and almost 50 other locations across the country, sir.

Secretary of Transportation Federico Pena. Good morning, Mr. President.

The President. Good morning.

Secretary Cisneros. Mr. President, we appreciate you being able to be with us, given the circumstances in Atlanta. I admire your statement of just a few moments ago to the country. And we know your time is very short, but we deeply appreciate your reserving some time to make a short statement to these communities across America. We have over 1,000 people in homes all across the country ready to roll out their “Adelante Con Clinton '96” effort, and we just appreciate your being here.

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you, Henry. Thank you, Federico. And I want to thank all the others who are there today, the Members of Congress and the other leaders, the call leaders: Jose Villareal, Don Mares, Peggy Anastos, Ray Sanchez, E.J. Salcinas, and Mayor Joe Serna, Luis Gutierrez, Freddy Ferrer, everyone else, thank you for doing this.

All of you know what happened at the Olympics last night. And I was up most of the night getting reports and following it. So I'm sorry I can't spend as much time as I planned to on the call. I want to thank you for the work you've done, and I'm looking forward to meeting with you, working with you. And as you know, “Adelante Con Clinton” is very important to what we're trying to do this year. And every one of you should know how much I personally appreciate it.

I want to say also a word, if I might, about how saddened Hillary and I were to hear yesterday about the death of Dr. Hector Garcia. We had both known him for more than 20 years, and he was to us a real American hero. From his service in World War II to his work as an ambassador through the American GI Forum, which he founded, and the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, on which he served, he was a clear voice for Hispanic civil rights. And I just wanted to say to all of you we should honor him best by committing ourselves to continue the work of his life. He was a remarkable man.

The other thing I'd like to say, just very briefly, is that it seems to me that as much as any group of Americans, Hispanic-Americans em-